

Cross-Party Group on Visual Impairment

Wednesday 8 December 2021, 13.00-14.00, by Teams

Minute

Present

MSPs

1. Stuart McMillan MSP
2. Paul O'Kane MSP
3. Colin Smyth MSP

Invited guests

1. Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP
2. Hazel McFarlane, Scottish Sensory Hub [group member]
3. Laura Walker, Visibility [group member]

Non-MSP Group Members

1. James Adams, RNIB Scotland
2. Deirdre Aitken
3. Paul Bartley, Optelec
4. Salena Begley, Family Fund
5. Claire Black, NHS Education for Scotland
6. Ian Brown, RNIB Scotland
7. Catriona Burness, RNIB Scotland
8. Lesley Carcary, seescape
9. Scott Cassidy, Blind Veterans UK
10. Lucy Chetty, The Royal Blind School/Sight Scotland
11. Bruce Christie, RNIB Scotland Advisory Group
12. Niall Foley, Guide Dogs Scotland
13. Claire Forde, RNIB Scotland Advisory Group
14. Amanda Foster
15. Councillor Sheila Hands
16. Thomas Heald
17. Ian Hughes, Associated Optical
18. Thelma Ingram

19. Natasha Johnston, Visibility
20. Laura Jones, RNIB Scotland
21. Sheila Mackenzie, Scottish Sensory Centre, University of
Edinburgh
22. Anne MacLean
23. Maureen Macmillan, Sight Action
24. Maureen McAllister
25. Elizabeth McCann, Moray House School of Education and
Sport, University of Edinburgh
26. Gwenn McCreath, Vision PK
27. Nikki McElvanney,
28. Hazel McFarlane, Scottish Sensory Hub
29. Debbie McGill, ABDO
30. Rachael McMurchy, RNIB Scotland
31. Terry Moody
32. Sally Paterson, Vision Support Service Aberdeen City
Council
33. Amira Petrescu, Police Scotland
34. Nicoletta Primo, Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans
35. Linda Middlemist, Guide Dogs Scotland
36. Rod Murchison
37. Mary Rasmussen
38. Ann Robertson, NESS
39. Susan Robinson
40. Terry Robinson
41. Kirin Saeed
42. Angus Scott, NHS Forth Valley
43. Clare Sweeney, Visibility
44. Katrina Thomson, RNIB
45. Mhairi Thurston, VI Charity Sector Partnership Mental Health
Committee
46. Laura Walker, Visibility
47. Sandra Wilson
48. Jacquie Winning, Forth Valley Sensory Centre
49. Cate Vallis, RNIB Scotland

Apologies

1. Richard Baker, Sight Scotland and Sight Scotland Veterans
2. Jeremy Balfour MSP
3. Neil Bibby MSP
4. Sally Cameron, seescape
5. Sheila Chappell, seescape

6. Helen Court, NHS Education for Scotland
7. John Donaldson, Sight Scotland - Scottish Braille Press
8. Laura Gray, Macular Society
9. Joan Kerr
10. Hawys Kilday, Sight Scotland
11. David McKerral
12. Councillor Robert Mooney
13. Julie Mosgrove, Optometry Scotland
14. Hussein Patwa
15. David Quigley, Optometry Scotland
16. Alison Rae, Dundee Blind & Partially Sighted Society
17. Ken Reid
18. Allan Russell, Connect Radio
19. Alan Stewart
20. Colette Walker

Agenda item 1 Welcome

The Convener of the CPGVI, Stuart McMillan MSP, welcomed members to the meeting and read aloud the GDPR statement.

Agenda item 2 Approval of minutes of last meeting

Minutes were proposed by Terry Robinson and were seconded by Nicoletta Primo (Sight Scotland). No amendments were made.

Agenda item 3 Matters arising.

The minutes referred to Accessible Voting and Terry Robinson asked what provisions are being made for the election in May 2022. Stuart McMillan reported that the Minister for Parliamentary Business, George Adam MSP, has been invited to give an update at the next meeting in February/March on this topic. He also described the accessible voting event at the Forth Valley Sensory Centre, hosted by RNIB Scotland and FVSC, where MPs, MSPs and local councillors had the opportunity to find out what it's like trying to vote in secret at the ballot box if you're blind or partially sighted.

Agenda item 4 Transitions Bill

Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP gave an update on her Member's Bill, the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions) (Scotland) Bill,

saying that it has the potential to make a massive difference to disabled people's lives.

The bill was initially proposed in Session 5 by Johann Lamont MSP on the basis that disabled people are five times more likely to leave education without qualifications; the disability employment gap has since increased. As Johann Lamont stood down at the 2021 election Pam Duncan-Glancy took over the bill which aims to give every young person a transition plan, starting in school and covering transition to further/higher education/training/work. She hoped that there would soon be enough cross-party support to allow the bill to progress through parliament.

Claire Sweeney asked how the bill would ensure that young people, and those who support them, get what they are entitled to. Pam Duncan-Glancy advised that, as with any legislation, the public need to be aware of it and there will be an opportunity for public and parliamentary scrutiny as well as dedicated work to communicate the stages of the bill and to promote its contents if it is passed.

Anne MacLean asked what support there had been from disabled trade union groups. Pam Duncan-Glancy said that these groups including the STUC Disabled Workers Committee were supportive. She said that cuts to additional support needs funding have been unacceptable, and she has meetings scheduled with several trade unions.

Bruce Christie said that it is important that employers offer apprenticeship level positions and that this should also be considered alongside educational institutions within the bill. Pam Duncan-Glancy agreed that it was important to look at the role of employers. She has recently met with Skills Development Scotland and appreciates that Modern Apprenticeships have not delivered well in terms of disabled young people. Internships with Inclusion Scotland were cited as a positive example of working with employers to facilitate job experience.

Salena Begley MBE of Family Fund said that good planning is required prior to the transition to adult life and that good relationships, assessment and planning are needed to identify and meet additional support needs. Moreover, transition planning needs to look beyond learning needs to include also consider health and social care needs.

Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP said that she knew that some parents are worried that their young people are leaving school and the process has

not yet started. The bill asks for this to be done as early as possible, ideally at a young age, and no later than three months before their 16th birthday.

The bill was drafted in Session 5 and while some changes were made following the earlier consultation process, she was keen to hear views on any amendment that might be required. She added that it would not be possible to address all issues with one bill however attempts to solve one part of the system can influence change in other areas such as social care, housing, and employment.

Action: CPGVI Secretary Catriona Burness to circulate Pam Duncan-Glancy's MSP email address to CPG membership afterwards to allow people to contact Pam directly.

Agenda item 5 Rehabilitation/Habilitation Workforce Survey Findings 2021

Laura Walker, Chief Executive, Visibility, and Hazel McFarlane, Senior Sensory Hub Officer, Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) made a joint presentation on rehabilitation/habilitation.

Laura Walker outlined the background to the survey. There is a national shortage of rehabilitation and habilitation professionals and this is having an impact on service provision. Habilitation services support individuals aged 0-25 years to be independent.

Training for rehabilitation and habilitation specialists was previously available in Glasgow. However, this course no longer exists, and it is necessary to go to Birmingham for training which adds to costs. Covid has also had an impact because in some areas, services were redeployed to adult services or Occupational Therapy. We are at a crisis point in specialist services in Scotland.

Discussions are now ongoing between Sight Scotland, Visibility and Glasgow Caledonian University to determine if a rehabilitation/habilitation course can be provided in Scotland.

Hazel McFarlane summarised the findings of the co-produced Alliance Survey circulated within the sight loss sector. There were 21 responses: 13 came from Health and Social Care Partnerships; four from national third sector organisations; and three from local third sector organisations.

Some responses contained incomplete information. For example, age ranges or qualifications were incomplete. There were also incomplete responses regarding waiting lists and times for rehabilitation and habilitation services. This made it hard to evaluate the impact on the services delivery. It is acknowledged that further information gathering is needed within Scotland.

The survey findings included:

- Age ranges provided for 44 Rehabilitation and 12 Habilitation Officers indicated that 54 per cent were over the age of 50, suggesting an aging workforce.
- Most qualifications had been gained from London or Birmingham although 40 people qualified from Glasgow Caledonian University when the course was available.
- In addition, 13 of 21 teams were at capacity, especially Health and Social Care Partnerships. Those not at capacity cited issues in recruiting suitably qualified individuals.
- Rehabilitation standards are for people to be seen within 1 month. Waiting times were often 3-6 months but in some areas, there is 6-12 months waiting time for rehabilitation services. If a case is identified as urgent, they would be seen as soon as possible, within three months.

There was a willingness to fund places on Low Vision Course at Glasgow Caledonian University if it was to recommence. The qualification is normally at diploma level. The Low Vision Centre, Applied Nursing Centre and Optometry are also hosted at Glasgow Caledonian. In addition, the course has been approved to run and is ready to go.

Elizabeth McCann said that the University of Edinburgh previously ran a course on habilitation but that it was removed due to lack of uptake. Mhairi Thurston was in favour of reinstating the Glasgow Caledonian course but noted the need to identify how the sector can support and put forward students for the course.

Philippa Mason asked if the overall survey findings will be released to the sector to allow a clearer picture and identify geographic split of respondents to help identify gaps.

Laura Walker suggested that the goal should be for the profession to be regulated, like allied health professionals so that Councils and Health Boards appreciate that people with visual impairment need this service and it can be promoted within schools to encourage people into the

professions. The immediate need is to get the course restarted to start to overcome the backlog and provide the right services at the right time. At present there is nothing to promote because no training is available in Scotland.

Action: Laura Walker and Hazel McFarlane to draft a letter on the report. Mhairi Thurston and Elizabeth McCann to look at it from a university perspective. Once wording agreed, CPG Secretary to send to SG and universities. Anne MacLean separately encouraged individuals to write to local authorities and MSPs.

Action: The CPG Secretary to circulate the Rehabilitation and Habilitation Workforce Survey to the CPGVI membership when available.

Agenda item 6 Future CPGVI topics

A list of possible topics will be circulated to membership for prioritisation via a members' survey as was done previously in Session 5. Discussion at the CPGVI meeting in September identified 13 topics as listed in the minutes.

CPG Secretary Catriona Burness will recirculate the list with an invitation to add other topics by a deadline of Friday 14 January. The survey will be sent out to members on Friday 21 January and will be open for two weeks.

The CPGVI has already agreed to invite the Minister for Parliamentary Business, George Adam MSP, to speak to the CPG on accessible voting before the Scottish local government elections whilst Marie Todd MSP, the Minister responsible for Visual Impairment has expressed interest in coming to an early meeting of the CPGVI. These dates will be subject to ministerial availability.

Agenda item 7 Any other competent business.

Lateral flow tests

Terry Robinson said that while the public are being urged to do tests in a household with two visually impaired people, without a sighted guide, it is not possible. If they were to have symptoms, they could not invite anyone in either and the GP and pharmacy cannot do it.

It was noted that the inaccessibility of lateral flow tests had been raised in Chamber by Jeremy Balfour MSP on 7 December. Stuart McMillan

MSP advised that it would also be useful for CPG to write to First Minister.

Traffic lights

Terry also raised concerns about broken controlled crossings and whether it would be of value to submit a freedom of information request to all local authorities, Stuart McMillan MSP said would be preferable to email each local authority and Transport Scotland.

Covid passports

Cllr Hands asked if the CPG could also write to First Minister to raise the issue to covid passports and the difficulties many people face taking the required photo. The app provides prompts if the camera is too close or too far away but does not tell you when you are in the correct position.

Online vaccine booking system

Kirin Saeed said she found it was not possible to book covid vaccines online without sighted assistance because the system is not accessible. Hazel McFarlane advised Jaws software does not pick up the option to pick up a PCR test and she had to request one over the telephone only to be sent a lateral flow test in error.

Family Fund

Salena Begley added a link in the chat for details of a fund for families who might be eligible for a grant and invited anyone to get in touch to discuss.

MSP Sight Loss Awareness campaign

Claire Forde's MSP Sight Loss Awareness campaign continues even though she has stepped down as an MSYP. She has had an overwhelming response from MSPs but urged any MSPs who have not yet responded to do so.

Action: CPG Secretary to send Salena Begley's contact details to CPG list.

Action: A letter to be sent to the First Minister/Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport addressing the questions of help to carry out lateral flow tests; the accessibility of the covid passport app; and the inaccessibility of booking in online for vaccines or requesting PCR tests.

Action: An email to be sent to each Scottish local authority asking if they were aware of how many traffic lights at controlled crossings were

broken (either the rotating cone or beep function did not work) and if the authority had a repairs programme.

Agenda item 8 Date of next meeting
To be confirmed.